

LANGUAGE DIVERSIFICATION IN ANCIENT PERIOD

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Abstract. *The English language has a rich and fascinating history that spans over 1,400 years. From its earliest roots in Old English to its modern-day form, the English language has evolved and transformed over time, reflecting changes in society, culture, and technology. The study of language evolution is not only important for understanding the history of the English language, but also for understanding the world we live in today.*

Key words. Middle ages, language, context, literature church, Central Asia, Middle East.

During the Middle Ages (approximately 5th to late 15th century), language use varied widely across Europe, the Middle East, and other regions, depending on the time period, location, and societal context. Here's an overview:

1. Europe

Latin: The dominant written language in Western Europe, used in religion, education, law, and scholarship. The Catholic Church used Latin extensively, and it was the lingua franca of scholars.

Vernacular Languages: Everyday spoken languages evolved from Latin (in regions of the former Roman Empire) into Romance languages: Old French, Old Spanish, Old Italian, Old Portuguese, Romanian. In Germanic regions, people spoke Old English, Old High German, Old Norse, or related dialects. The Celtic languages (e.g., Old Irish, Welsh, Breton) persisted in parts of the British Isles and Brittany. Slavic languages (e.g., Old Church Slavonic, Old Russian) were used in Eastern Europe. **Greek:** Widely used in the Byzantine Empire, especially for administration, literature, and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Hebrew and Arabic: Spoken and written in regions under Jewish or Islamic influence, including parts of Spain, Sicily, and the Middle East.

2. Middle East and North Africa

Arabic: Dominant in the Islamic world, used for administration, trade, science, and religion (Quranic Arabic). Arabic spread through conquests and became a scholarly language, influencing Europe during the medieval period.

Persian: A major cultural and literary language, especially in Persia (modern-day Iran), Central Asia, and parts of India.

Turkic languages: Spoken in Central Asia and later Anatolia as the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks rose to power. **Coptic:** Used by Egyptian Christians for religious purposes, though Arabic gradually replaced it.

3. South Asia

Sanskrit: Dominant in religious texts, scholarly works, and high culture. Prakrits and early vernacular languages (e.g., Old Hindi, Tamil) were spoken by the general population.

4. East Asia

Chinese: Classical Chinese (written) was widely used for administration, literature, and philosophy in China, Korea, and Japan.

Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese: Spoken vernacular languages, though heavily influenced by Chinese writing and culture.

5. Trade and Contact

Lingua Franca: In trade routes, such as the Silk Road and the Mediterranean, a mix of languages was spoken.

Arabic, Greek, Persian, and various Turkic languages often served as trade languages. Lingua Franca itself was a Mediterranean pidgin combining Italian, Arabic, and other elements. Medieval linguistic diversity was immense, with languages often evolving rapidly. Written language tended to be more conservative than spoken forms, contributing to the eventual emergence of modern languages. The differences between languages in the Middle Ages and those of today can be seen in how languages evolved, were used, and their societal roles. Here's a comparison:

1. Evolution of Languages Then: Languages were more fragmented, with numerous dialects even within the same region. Many languages spoken in the Middle Ages (e.g., Old English, Old French, Old Norse) have evolved into modern forms that can be very different. Latin, dominant in the Middle Ages, has largely been replaced by modern Romance languages like Spanish, French, and Italian. Now: Modern languages are more standardized due to printing, education, and globalization. Many dialects have faded or been replaced by national languages (e.g., regional dialects of Old German or Old French became modern German and French).

2. Role of Lingua Francas Then: Latin was the primary written and scholarly lingua franca in Europe. Arabic and Persian were lingua francas in the Islamic world. Trade languages like Old Turkic, Greek, and Lingua Franca (a Mediterranean pidgin) connected different regions. Now: English is the global lingua franca, widely used in business, science, technology, and media. Other major global languages, like Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and French, play important international roles.

3. Literacy and Written Language Then: Literacy rates were extremely low, and most people could not read or write. Written language was limited to clergy, scholars, and the elite. Written language was formal and often distinct from spoken language.

Now: Literacy is widespread, and the written word is a central part of everyday life (e.g., books, social media, texting).

Written language is closer to spoken language, especially in informal contexts.

4. Technology and Communication Then: Communication relied on face-to-face interaction, letters (often written by scribes), and oral tradition. Language spread slowly, and dialects developed in relative isolation.

Now: Technology like the internet, smartphones, and social media allows languages to spread instantly. Languages influence each other more rapidly, leading to the creation of new slang, loanwords, and hybrid languages.

5. Language Diversity Then: There were many more languages and dialects, as communities were isolated and not standardized. Many languages were oral and lacked written systems.

Now: Thousands of smaller languages have disappeared or are endangered due to globalization and the dominance of major languages.

Efforts are being made to preserve endangered languages, but linguistic diversity has diminished.

6. Education and Language Learning

Then: Formal education was rare and often only in religious institutions. Learning a second language (e.g., Latin) was limited to the elite.

Now: Education is widespread, and learning multiple languages is common in schools and through apps or travel.

In summary, modern languages are more standardized, widely used, and influenced by technology and globalization, while medieval languages were more localized, diverse, and shaped by oral traditions and limited literacy.

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